



## Proposed Framework for the Management of Resorts Mini Clubs: An Ambidextrous Approach

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# Proposed Framework for the Management of Resorts Mini Clubs: An Ambidextrous Approach

**Article classification:** Research paper

## Abstract

This paper examines Mini Clubs in holiday resorts from a management perspective. Key objective of the paper is the development of an ambidextrous strategic framework for Mini Clubs, framework that may help them in the design of ambidextrous capabilities across their portfolio of activities, in pursuit of competitive advantage for the holiday resort. This conceptual research paper uses secondary research by identifying relevant academic and industry data and sources, collecting, analysing and comparing different literature sources and data pertaining to the leisure and hospitality sector in order to inform the development of an ambidextrous strategic framework and strategic initiatives for Mini Clubs in holiday resorts. Drawing on ambidextrous approaches to management, this study has found that Mini Clubs, whilst predominantly adopting an exploitative approach, need to redesign their services to enhance children’s experiences but also to contribute to the resorts’ competitive edge. The study suggests that a two-step strategy needs to be implemented by leisure organisations, namely an increased complexity strategy and an increased divergence strategy, which would make a strategic shift to a more exploratory approach and therefore ambidextrous management and marketing practices. Management initiatives are proposed and discussed in relation to key global trends influencing the leisure and hospitality sector. The paper represents the first endeavour to examine the management of resort Mini Clubs, proposes to fill a gap in the literature aimed to recognise the increasing role of children activities in the leisure and hospitality sector, and contributes to the study of ambidextrous management in leisure research.

**Keywords:** Leisure; Hospitality; Mini Clubs; Ambidextrous Management; Entertainment; Animation

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**1. Introduction**

In an increasingly competitive business environment in the leisure and hospitality sector, hotels and holiday resorts have to be able to react and adapt to the changing market, not only by reassessing their economic goals, but more importantly, by taking into consideration social aspects that may influence their success. Stimulation of the body, spirit and social activities become an increasingly important component of the family holiday package, which, in essence, represents the concept of animation in tourism and hospitality services (Pompl, 1983). Entertainment and animation programmes are one of the keys to the success of resorts as they contribute to the overall experience of customers, but also a good way for resorts to differentiate themselves from competitors (Mikulic & Prebezac, 2011; Sotiriadis, 2014). Despite the importance of entertainment and animation in resorts, research in this area is limited (Mikulic & Prebezac, 2011). The focus of this research is on holiday resorts for families, which typically offer leisure and tourism services designed for families (e.g. children’s Clubs and other facilities for children). Although the term ‘resort’ is sometimes used for a hotel property that may provide children facilities, a hotel is often a central feature of a resort hence the specific focus of this paper is on the broader term, i.e. holiday resort (Nagle, 1999) and, more specifically, Mini-Clubs in holiday resorts, which are examined from a management perspective.

Typically, three types of entertainment and animation programmes are offered by resorts: (a) sport activities; (b) evening entertainment; and (c) entertainment for children (Mikulic & Prebezac, 2011). This paper focuses on entertainment for children and the providers of this type of entertainment (Ozel, 2015; Sotiriadis, 2014), i.e. Mini Clubs (or Kids Clubs), an under-researched area (Mikulic & Prebezac, 2011). Regardless of the destination country and holiday resort, the activities offered to children in Mini Clubs are often similar (Gaines, Hubbard, Witte, & O' Neil, 2004; Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001; Sotiriadis, 2014). For this reason, Mini Clubs do no longer provide competitive advantage to different resorts. This paper argues that Mini Clubs have to reassess their management approach and adopt an ambidextrous approach when considering developing an innovative portfolio of activities offered to children in Mini Clubs. The challenge faced by Mini Club managers will then be to develop a range of ambidextrous capabilities that will provide them with competitive advantage. The key objective of this paper is to propose a management framework that may help Mini Clubs in the design of ambidextrous capabilities across their portfolio of activities. Subsequently, the research question for this study is: What operational strategy can be put in place by resort Mini Clubs managers to develop ambidextrous portfolios of activities?

Apart from the study conducted by Gaines et al. (2014), research on children's programmes in the hotel and resort industry and research specific to Mini Clubs

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is non-existent. This study represents the first endeavour to examine the management of resort Mini Clubs and it proposes to fill a gap in the literature aimed to recognise the increasing role of children and children activities in the leisure and hospitality sector. Both industry and academia recognise the value and impact children have on family purchase decisions (Cullingford, 1995; Lugosi, Robinson, Golubovskaya, & Foley, 2016; Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001; Poria & Timothy, 2014) and the fact that children have distinct needs and interests that need to be accounted for (Dowse, Powell, & Weed, 2018; Khoo-Latimore, Prayag, & Cheah, 2015; Lasley & Harryman, 1997; Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). The following two quotes encapsulate well the importance of children for the tourism industry: First, ‘children are the tourists of the future’ (Cullinford, 1995, p. 121). Second, ‘the future of family tourism then lies in capturing the diverse needs of children’ (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015, p. 145). Despite all this, ‘the role of children has been under-researched and under-valued’ (Thornton, Shaw, & Williams, 1997, p. 287), and more research is needed to understand the role of children as an important stakeholder group for the hospitality sector (Dowse, Powell, & Weed, 2018; Radic, 2017). Lugosi et al. (2016) describe children as sovereign consumers who are active decision-makers.

This paper recognises the increasing role of children in developing management strategies aimed to cater for this segment of the market and it thus focuses on Mini-Clubs in resorts viewed from an ambidextrous management perspective.

Ambidextrous management requires a good balance between exploitation of existing resources and competencies with a focus on the present, and exploration of new opportunities with a focus on the future (Filippini, Guttel, & Nosella, 2012; M. Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016). In line with this approach, first, the paper examines the way Mini Clubs are currently managed in terms of activities offered and the use of existing sources (exploitation). Second, the paper proposes and explains the operational strategy (organisational ambidexterity) that can place Mini Club portfolio of activities within the ambidextrous framework (exploration), and potential strategic initiatives are suggested. Finally, the paper explores how the suggested strategy responds to key global trends in the leisure and hospitality sector, discusses the contribution of this research and suggests avenues for further research in this area.

## 2. Contextual framework

### 2.1. *Mini Clubs within the resort services*

The central role of hotels within resorts is to provide accommodation to visitors; but even more so, resorts must add value to their customers' experience by providing ancillary services and products (Page, 2013). Entertainment and animation services (figure 1) are an important service component as they 'make the place come alive with sensory stimulation and appealing atmosphere' (Sotiriadis, 2014, p. 692). Animation is used to meet vacationers' needs for fun

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and entertainment but to also provide them with an opportunity to socialise (Sotiriadis, 2014). These services, among others, contribute to the level of guest satisfaction (Mikulic & Prebazac, 2011; Sotiriadis, 2014).

**[INSERT FIGURE 1]**

The entertainment provided to children depends on children’s age. Children are placed either in baby clubs; mini clubs; junior clubs; and teenager clubs (Ozel, 2015). Typically, activities include didactic games and creative activities; trips; workshops; arts and crafts; movies; themed-activities, and sport-related activities (Lasley & Harryman, 1997; Mikulic & Prebazac, 2011; Ozel, 2015; Sotiriadis, 2014). According to research carried out by Ozel (2015) and Thornton et al. (1997) swimming pool activities are the most popular activities with children. Nickerson and Jurowski (2001) suggested that, when on holidays, children particularly like active and stimulating activities. Also, whilst having fun, the parents want their children to learn in a safe environment (Johns & Gyimothy, 2002). Apart from entertainment, services provided by Mini Clubs include babysitting, children’s special menu and special events (Sotiriadis, 2014).

In general, the objectives of Mini Clubs are to contribute to the development of children’s self-respect; arouse their interest towards learning; contribute to the mental and physical development of children; spend quality time; socialise and interact with their peers from different parts of the world; generate pleasant memories/souvenirs; and enjoy some kind of autonomy (Ozel, 2015; Radic,



2017). That said, Mini Clubs may be perceived to, in fact, defeat the objectives of family holidays, namely spending time together, ‘keeping bonds alive and creating family memories’ (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015, p. 141), because while in the Mini Club children are separated from their parents. Since activities in Mini Clubs are operated based on age groups, children may experience separation from their siblings too (Ozel, 2015).

When it comes to animation programmes, *Club Med* opened the way as early as the 1970’s (Sotiriadis, 2014). Hyatt was a forerunner (Gaines et al., 2004; Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). Other chains such as Radisson, Holiday Inn, and Four Seasons started to follow the trend by providing children’s programmes, amenities and activities (Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). Nowadays, Mini Clubs are a rather wide spread service provided by holiday resort operators such as Look Voyages (Look.fr); Sandal Resorts (Beachresorts.co.uk); Phoenician Resort (Gaines et al., 2008), and others.

## 2.2. *Assessing the current use and management of Mini Clubs*

The strategic management process consists of analysis (of the mission, vision, strategic objectives, internal and external environment), strategic decisions (where and how competition will take place) and actions (leading to strategy implementation) that organisations carry out in order to generate competitive

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advantages and to satisfy stakeholders (Simao, 2013). Similarly, the following sections of this paper will:

- (a) Analyse the current use of Mini Clubs and the ability to generate competitive advantage;
- (b) Discuss potential decisions regarding the future strategic orientation of Mini Clubs; and
- (c) Develop a strategic framework that may be implemented by practitioners.

In order to analyse the current use of Mini Clubs and the ability to generate competitive advantage, the VRIO strategic framework (i.e. Value, Rarity, Imitability of resources and capabilities, and Organisation - ability to exploit the resource or capability) is a useful ‘Resource-based View’ strategic management tool for resources analysis (table 1). The management of resources is extremely important for the sustainability of any tourism organisation (Simao, 2013).

**[INSERT TABLE 1]**

The VRIO framework allows an organisation to consider and implement strategies that will improve its efficiency, effectiveness, and ability to exploit opportunities and to neutralise threats (Barney, 1997; Quattrociochi, Mercuri, Perano & Calabrese, 2017; Simao, 2013). The most desirable scenario for an organisation is to have resources that are valuable but rare, non-substitutable and hard to imitate, and the organisation has the ability to exploit the resource or capability. In this case, sustainable competitive advantage is created, and in terms

of performance, the organisation achieves above-average returns (Simao, 2013; Hanson, Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson, 2017). In this research, the VRIO framework is used to analyse the management of Mini Clubs in resorts.

An analysis of activities offered by Mini Clubs revealed that they are quite similar from one resort to another (Radisson, Holiday Inn, Four Seasons, Hyatt, Club Med, etc.). These findings are further supported by research conducted by Sotiriadis (2014); Gaines et al. (2004); and Nickerson & Jurowski (2001). These activities are therefore no longer valuable or rare. They are easy to imitate by all resorts with a Mini Club. Subsequently, the VRIO analysis revealed that Mini Clubs, as they are currently being managed, do not provide competitive advantage to resorts anymore. For example, when Club Med opened the first Mini Club in the 1970s (Sotiriadis, 2014), they offered a distinct competitive advantage to Club Med resorts, however, are no longer performing at that level – their Mini Club model was quickly replicated by other competitors in the hospitality sector. For operators of Mini Clubs, this is a clear indication that Mini Clubs need to innovate the way they are currently being operated in order for this product and service offered to children and their families to regain its role as a differentiating and competitive advantage product and service. Indeed, innovation is all about introducing new concepts that would meet the needs of existing and new customers, is a beneficial strategy for organisations as it contributes to stimulate increased spending and growth but requires a capacity of adaptation. Brooker and

Joppe (2014) explain that changes linked to innovations are either incremental, i.e. operators employ reactionary actions (as opposed to proactive actions) to maintain their business rather than growing it, and the objectives are mainly short-term); or radical, i.e. introducing new ideas that disrupt existing practices and current conventions). Nonetheless, in the tourism industry innovations are, more often, incremental (Brooker & Joppe, 2014). This industry choice for incremental innovation instead of radical innovation may be explained by the fact that the industry is deeply rooted in heritage and authenticity (Kowalczyk, 2014), but also due to the fact that tourism has a Janus-faced character, in other words changes can have simultaneous positive and negative impacts (Sanchez & Adams, 2008). Indeed, in order for Mini Clubs to provide competitive advantage for resorts once again, radical innovation seems to be necessary. In this regard, a new approach in managing Mini Clubs becomes essential, i.e. an approach that disrupts existing practices and current conventions.

Arguably, Mini Clubs represent one of the very few areas in the leisure and hospitality sector that has not seen much development lately in terms of innovation. Mini Clubs operators have an opportunity to create something new by destroying an existing model that has been commodified (Mitchell, 1998), and embracing opportunities to reinvent themselves sustainably (Seraphin, 2018).

The following section of the paper explains the operational strategy (organisational ambidexterity) that may be applied to ensure Mini Clubs regain their competitiveness.

### 3. Conceptual framework

#### 3.1. *Ambidexterity: Overview of the approach*

Ambidexterity is a concept developed by Duncan in 1976 (Duncan, 1976). This concept calls for a balance between exploration and exploitation. Indeed, organisations deeply anchored onto exploration suffer the costs of experimentation (R&D) with, sometimes, limited benefits. Organisations anchored onto exploitation, on the other hand, do not move forward and remain in a ‘status-quo’ in terms of performance. Organisations that manage to find a balance between exploitation and exploration are likely to be prosperous (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2014). The same can be said about mastering a balance between adaptability (in other words the ability of the organisation to innovate and to adapt to changes in the market) and alignment (the daily management of operations). This approach is about balancing exploitation of existing resources and competencies with a focus on the present, and exploring new opportunities, with a focus on the future (Filippini, Guttel, & Nosella, 2012; M. Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016). Despite the challenges of achieving ambidexterity because exploitation and exploration innovation are contradictory activities, M.

Mihalache and Mihalache (2016, p. 144) explain that ‘organisational ambidexterity’ is a key driver of sustained performance in the tourism industry. It enables firms to make the most of their current capabilities while at the same time developing new ones to attract new customers.

Still, according to Nieto-Rodriguez (2014), organisational ambidexterity requires changes in leadership and culture; people and skills; structure and governance; enterprise performance management; and systems and tools. In particular, Visser (2015) suggests that effective organisational change requires enterprise reform, stakeholder engagement, and future-fitness. Enterprise reform is about changing the business purpose (Visser, 2015). Specifically in the context of this paper, reforming the purpose of Mini Clubs means transforming Mini Clubs into a tool that can give resorts competitive advantage. As for future-fitness, the focus is on how businesses can prepare for the future while maximising the chances of success and shaping the future (Visser, 2015). The objective of this research paper is to devise a framework that would integrate Mini Clubs within the local community and culture, hence providing for stakeholder engagement opportunities. Recent research (Coldwell, 2017; Gordon, 2017; Moscardo, Konovalov, Murphy, & McGehee, 2017; Skift, 2017) provides evidence that bridging the gap between locals and visitors by encouraging real encounters is important to ensure a good relationship between both groups and, subsequently, the sustainability of the destination. Last but not least, stakeholder engagement is

about building a company brand that conveys messages to interested parties, and augments their reputation and performance (Visser, 2015). The suggested new management approach should give to families (parents and children) and to locals, the image that resorts are promoting family bonds and encouraging real encounters between visitors and locals for the enrichment of both sides. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) claim that the interaction between groups and/or individuals are often seen as interdependent, with the potential to generate high quality relationships. That said, in the tourism context, the relationship between local residents and tourists would remain positive, only on the premise that the profit for residents is higher than the cost involved. Their attitude changes when the cost exceeds profit (Haifeng, Jing, & Mu, 2012). This change in attitudes may be explained first, by the Social Exchange Theory (SET) which ‘insists all human behaviours will be dominated by some exchange activity with bonus and payment, therefore all human social activities can be regarded as an exchange, so is social relationship’ (Haifeng et al., 2012, p. 79). Second, taking the example of Venice, Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato (2018) explain that recent antitourism movements and tourismphobia are due to the fact that, for local residents, the cost of tourists/visitors is higher than the benefits. This is further substantiated by Seraphin, Gowreesunkar, Zaman and Bourliataux-Lajoie (2019) who explain that tourismphobia and antitourism movements are the result of an absence of a real and authentic encounter between locals and tourists (i.e. a dialogical / relational space that would create positive relationships between the two groups).



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3.2. *Ambidexterity in tourism*

In tourism research, ambidexterity is a rather new concept and, therefore, scarcely used by scholars. There are two streams of research in tourism regarding ambidextrous management. A first stream of research names and defines the concept, whereas a second stream of research applies the concept without referring to its name. Among those who actually name ambidexterity are, for instance Úbeda-García et al. (2016, 2018) who examined organisational ambidexterity in the hotel industry from a human resources perspective, Wang et al. (2018) who studied the process of hotel service innovation through ambidexterity, and Broker and Joppe (2014) who used the concept to conceptualise the different type of innovators in the tourism industry (i.e. painters, artisans and artists). Using the example of hurricane Irma’s impact on the tourism industry of the Caribbean, Seraphin (2018) explained that an ambidextrous management of the industry could lead to a sustainable reconstruction of the Caribbean. He indeed explained that an ambidextrous approach would consist in using the hurricane season to develop a new tourism product like hurricane and thunderstorms chasing. This approach would also consist in developing resorts under domes to counter the threat of adverse weather that affects hotel plants, tourist attractions and demands. Other scholars do not always refer to the term although they apply an ambidextrous management approach. For instance, Seraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar and Bonnardel (2016)



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3 explain that a good logo for a tourism destination should simultaneously maintain  
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5 the essence of the destination whilst contributing to change the image of the  
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7 destination, but at no point refer to the term 'ambidexterity'. The same could be  
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9 said about Sanchez and Adams (2008) who refer to tourism as a Janus-faced  
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19 strategic management approach would seem as a natural and relevant approach  
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21 for the industry, a systematic way of managing a destination or an organisation  
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### 36 *3.3. Two-step strategic approach*

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40 Managing Mini Clubs within an ambidextrous approach seems appropriate due  
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44 that this approach may bring to organisations. Applying an ambidextrous  
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46 management approach to the management of Mini Clubs implies a change in the  
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48 service operation. Bowie et al. (2017) claimed that change could happen either  
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57 (a) reducing the complexity strategy (reducing the number of steps to produce a  
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to the existing service); (c) reducing the divergence strategy (offering greater standardisation and consistency of the service); and finally, (d) increasing the divergence strategy (allowing for greater customisation of the offer, a strategy associated with a niche positioning strategy).

The proposed ambidextrous management approach for Mini Clubs suggested in this paper follows a two-step strategic approach and is aligned with (1) the increasing complexity strategy and (2) the increased divergence strategy. As such, in a first step, the increasing complexity strategy may be used to add an additional management and operational layer to the management of Mini-Clubs, which is currently exploitative only and explorative strategic initiatives should be considered as well. The second step should involve increased divergence strategic initiatives, i.e. a greater customisation of the Mini-Clubs' offer (by exploring new opportunities and trends) which in turn will provide resorts with an increased competitive advantage through an ambidextrous management approach. Adopting and implementing this type of strategy (with dual focus on increased complexity and divergence through exploitation and exploration) may contribute to addressing operational issues in the sector (Page, 2013).

Next, the paper explains from a practical angle how an ambidextrous management approach could be applied to Mini Clubs.

## 4. Proposed framework for the management of Mini Clubs

### 4.1. Mini Club: Strategic initiatives

It is important to imbed the Mini-Club into the environment of the destination (culture, traditions, heritage, etc.). Page (2013, p.173) believes that ‘hospitality services can in fact be developed as the prime attraction for a region when they are carefully developed around unique themes, utilising local produce, well-known chefs and celebrities, as well as high-quality public relations and media coverage’. The following strategic initiatives may provide for a potential framework to be used and implemented by Mini-Clubs when seeking competitive advantage, where additional layers of service are added because of application of increased complexity and increased divergence strategies:

(a) *Unique theme* – In line with ‘exploiting’ and ‘exploring’ greater stakeholder engagement, the unique theme could be around ‘bridging the gap between locals and visitors’. This may be achieved by giving the Mini Club a local name. The specific name given to businesses contributes to integrating them within the local community they operate in (Korstanje, 2012; Seraphin, 2014). For instance, Karibea Hotel, a chain of hotels in French Caribbean, has named their Mini Club ‘Club Ti Manmay’ (creole for ‘Kids Club’ or Mini Club). Giving a local name to the Mini Club sends a strong message to parents and children, telling them that they will have a unique local experience. It also sends a strong message to locals

working for the resort telling them that the resort and the Mini Clubs are not enclaves.

*(b) Local produce* – Food served at Mini Clubs could be sourced from exclusively local products. Lunch and/or dinner time at Mini Clubs could also be a learning activity, where children could be educated about traditional dishes and the ingredients they are made of. Food is a good educational tool. It also fosters real encounters between locals and visitors (Gordon, 2017). Mini Club programmes of activities may include cooking classes or activities run by local chefs. By using local products, it means that local producers (farmers) have the opportunity to increase their income and to have their products promoted and valued. This approach would contribute to the development of social and economic capital. When the benefits are shared between locals and visitors, the relationship between locals and visitors remains positive (Haifeng et al., 2012).

*(c) Well-known chefs and celebrities* – Well-known chefs and other celebrities could deliver cooking classes and other activities in Mini Clubs. This would enable the children (and potentially their parents) to meet, exchange information with and learn from local residents. At the same time, chefs could use this opportunity to promote their business, an effective marketing approach called advertainment, which is the merging of advertising and entertainment with the purpose of influencing customers toward a brand. This form of marketing is also viewed as a form of subliminal persuasion (Deery, 2004; Kumanyika, 2011).

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*(d) Social relations* - Another way to imbed Mini-Clubs into the local environment is to give access to the clubs to local kids, not just tourists. This is all the more important in emerging destinations where resorts are perceived as enclaves (Seraphin, Smith, Scott, & Stokes, 2018; Weeden, 2015). Giving locals access to enclaves (ambidextrous approach) can foster a stronger link between locals and visitors. From a logistics and safety point of view, as a starting point, children of staff working in the Mini Club may be granted access initially, with the possibility of further expanding the club's services to children of all staff working for the resort.

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*(e) Media coverage of events and activities* - At the end of each holiday season, Mini Club managers could organise events to display and broadcast the work produced by children (in pictures and/or videos) to promote Mini Clubs. These events could give parents and children an opportunity to participate in family activities and to bond. According to Radic (2017) it is something children are particularly interested in. Similarly, Khoo-Latimore, Prayag and Cheah (2015) suggest that resorts can add to family quality of life by encouraging parent-child interactions through family-orientated activities. This way, resorts build social capital and contribute to reducing family stress. In the same line of thought, Backer & Schänzel (2013) propose that good resort facilities for children contribute to reducing parents' stress, whilst poor facilities for children increase their stress. Yeoman (2013) explained that generation Y is always looking for an

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3 opportunity to celebrate. Axelsen and Swan (2010) explained that live events can  
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5 contribute to encourage people to consume a product as event fosters positive  
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7 perceptions of products and provide a unique experience. Axelsen and Swan  
8  
9 (2010) also highlighted the fact that events not only promote the products they  
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11 are focusing on but also the area where the events happen. Events also contribute  
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13 to the development of social capital (Andrews & Leopold, 2013) and the new  
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15 generation appreciate having opportunities to parade one's social and cultural  
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17 capital (Yeoman, 2013). Events may contribute to the positive image of Mini  
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19 Clubs and resorts. Indeed, Gartner (1993) argues that in tourism, the image of a  
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21 product or service is based upon information acquired either by induced agents  
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23 (advertisements); organic agents (personal experience which is the most trusted  
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25 source of information); and autonomous agents (media). The type of event  
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27 described here provides Mini Club managers an opportunity to develop a positive  
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29 image through induced, autonomous and organic agents.  
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41 In summary, children activities developed by Mini Clubs should take into  
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43 consideration the following aspects:  
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48 ■ Mini Clubs should have a local name and activities should be specific to  
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50 the Mini Club (therefore unique) and imbedded in the local culture.  
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54 ■ Local produce should be served, and educational activities delivered by  
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56 local residents should be developed around those products. Broadly  
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speaking, activities developed must break the image of resort (and Mini Clubs) as enclaves.

- Mini Clubs must play a role in family bonding and stress reduction
- Activities put in place in Mini Clubs must contribute to the positive image of the resort through all three agents (organic, autonomous and induced).

So far, this paper has identified that operational changes need to be made in resorts, specifically in the resorts' animation departments. The existent management approach of Mini Clubs does not contribute to the competitive advantage of the resort. The strategic initiatives recommended above should provide Mini Clubs managers with a potential framework to develop portfolios of activities following an ambidextrous approach. Nevertheless, legitimate questions about the hospitality sector as a whole need to be asked and, in particular, how has the sector changed and/or needs to change in response to changing markets and environments. The current trends in the hospitality sector and the ways in which resort Mini-Clubs may respond to these trends are discussed next, providing an opportunity for reflection on how the proposed strategic initiatives may respond to current and emerging trends.

#### *4.2. Responding to key global trends in the hospitality sector*

The hospitality sector has followed the globalisation trend. As a consequence, the sector has experienced changes over the years, from giving priority to service personalisation to increasing customer self-service (decreasing service levels and



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an increase use of technology). However, nowadays, there is a return to service personalisation as a strategy to gain competitive advantage (Lashley, 2015). For its survival and success, the sector needs to constantly adapt to the external factors that may impact businesses within the sector (i.e. the external business environment) and to adjust its internal business environment (i.e. internal resources and capabilities) accordingly (Jolliffe, 2006).

In order to gain and maintain competitive advantage, the hospitality sector has to be able to forecast the future (Richard, 2017). Yeoman (2013) identified a series of key trends that will influence the future of festivals and events, a sub-sector of the tourism industry (Getz, 2008). For this reason, one can assume that similar trends will affect tourism. Amongst other key consumer trends, key global trends are: (1) the new generation will look for more and more opportunities to celebrate; (2) because of nostalgia, vintage products or services will be very popular; (3) technology and, more specifically, mobile devices will have a growing importance; (4) there will be a focus on more authentic experiences for future customers; (5) innovation and search quality will continue to have a key role; (6) increased focus on ethical consumption; and (7) an increased interest of consumers in accumulation of social capital by connecting with others and developing networks. While one may argue that the above trends apply to adults (i.e. parents), scholars suggest that today’s children are eager to grow up, aspiring to be more like adults, are trying to emulate the consumer habits of adults, and



that a shrinking of childhood seems to take place (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015; and Yeoman, 2012). This phenomenon is often referred to as “age compression” or “children growing older younger” (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015, p.144). These trends thus highly resonate with the leisure and hospitality industry, and more specifically, with Mini Clubs and children, as consumers. The search for innovative and authentic activities, the increased demand for leisure activities, the impact of new technology, the need to accumulate social capital through connecting and networking with people, and responsible management and consumption are all relevant trends that cannot be ignored. Family holidays are a growing market for the tourism industry as families want more togetherness, they want to keep family bonds alive and to create lasting memories (Yeoman & Schänzel, 2015).

Mini Clubs could potentially play a major role in the future of the leisure and hospitality sector and should therefore take a proactive approach and respond to the aforementioned trends. The proposed responses and strategic initiatives suggested in this paper for the management of Mini Clubs would essentially provide opportunities for children to celebrate through activities and events when they display their work done during various workshops / sessions (addressing trend 1). Local heritage and culture should be maintained within the club by engaging locals (and local customs) in the delivery of activities (addressing trends 2, 6 and 9). Integrating new technologies and innovation in activities offered by Mini Clubs to children will also be important (addressing trends 4 and 7).

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Essentially, within an ambidextrous management approach Mini Clubs will need to, first, conciliate tradition with the involvement of locals who can share their culture with visitors (exploitation); and second, modernity and innovation with the integration of new technologies (exploration). Mini Clubs also need to maintain their original role, namely entertain children in a safe environment while their parents are away (exploitation – i.e. using current strategic capabilities effectively), whilst offering a competitive advantage to resorts (exploration – i.e. exploring and taking advantage of new strategic opportunities). The new ambidextrous management strategy for the design of activities offered in Mini Clubs suggested in this paper has the potential to turn Mini Clubs into a tool that generates competitive advantage for resorts.

**5. Conclusion**

For the purpose of this paper, we defined ‘Mini Clubs’ as a division of the animation department of a resort dedicated to young customers aiming at entertaining them while on holiday. Drawing on the ambidextrous approach to management, when Mini Clubs first appeared in the 1970s at Club Med and later at Hyatt in 1989 (Lasley & Harryman, 1997), they were innovative (exploratory) and generated competitive advantage for resorts. However, because they were later copied by other resorts, they are now merely exploitative, and they no longer provide competitive advantage. Resorts need to re-design their Mini Club

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3 services and inject innovation to make them exploratory and therefore to offer a  
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5 competitive advantage again. This innovation is important for resort Mini Clubs,  
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7 as they represent an investment in the future, since the main target customers are  
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9 children (i.e. the customers of tomorrow) and their families. Focusing on Mini  
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11 Clubs is a way for resorts to demonstrate their ability to have a long-term vision.  
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17 This paper highlighted the fact that an ambidextrous management approach could  
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19 be the way forward to improve the quality of products and services of Mini Clubs.  
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23 The paper proposed an ambidextrous management framework that should help  
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25 Mini Club managers to develop portfolios of activities that would contribute to  
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27 the competitive advantage of the resort and would positively contribute to the  
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29 experience of children by offering them unique and authentic activities whilst  
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31 developing social capital within and outside the family. Within this framework,  
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33 specific strategic initiatives were suggested, initiatives related to leveraging  
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35 current resources, on one hand, and exploring new opportunities, on the other  
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37 hand. Amongst these, in line with increased complexity and increased divergence  
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39 type of strategies, strategic initiatives such as development of a unique, local  
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41 theme, local and ethical sourcing of food and materials, novel advertainment  
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43 approaches, development of strong community-based social relations, and  
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45 building a positive image for the resort are key initiatives in the development of  
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47 Mini-Clubs as a strategic tool that facilitates competitive advantage. It is also  
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49 important to consider the proposed framework in light of current and emerging  
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global trends in the tourism and hospitality sector. The reflection on these trends has generated a further understanding of how the strategic initiatives proposed in this paper would fit within and cater for the changing markets and environment.

The contribution of this research lies in the analysis of management approaches used by resort Mini-Clubs, an under-researched area in the tourism and hospitality sector. The result of the examination of management approaches in Mini-Clubs is the presentation of an ambidextrous management framework, which would generate competitive advantage. This study adds to literature on ambidextrous management approaches in the tourism and hospitality sector, providing new grounds for the process of understanding ambidextrous approaches to management in the particular context of resort Mini-Clubs. Consequently, from an industry and organisational perspective, practitioners and managers in the hospitality sector may find these research findings useful in guiding them in the development of innovative and ambidextrous strategic initiatives.

This research has largely focused on the benefits of Mini Clubs as an ambidextrous management tool and their potential to create competitive advantage for resorts. Future research efforts should also focus on understanding the benefits that Mini Clubs may bring to local communities. At the same time, a useful extension of this research may be investigating also the downfalls and disadvantages of Mini Clubs such as outsourcing of childcare from the family,

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3 separation of children in different age-related groups, separation from siblings,  
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6 etc. In addition, further research in the area of ambidextrous approaches to  
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9 managing Mini Clubs in particular, and hotels/resorts more generally, should  
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11 focus on the application of such ambidextrous frameworks, using case  
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14 methodological approaches, which will generate further insights into the success  
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17 factors (or failure) of ambidextrous management approaches.  
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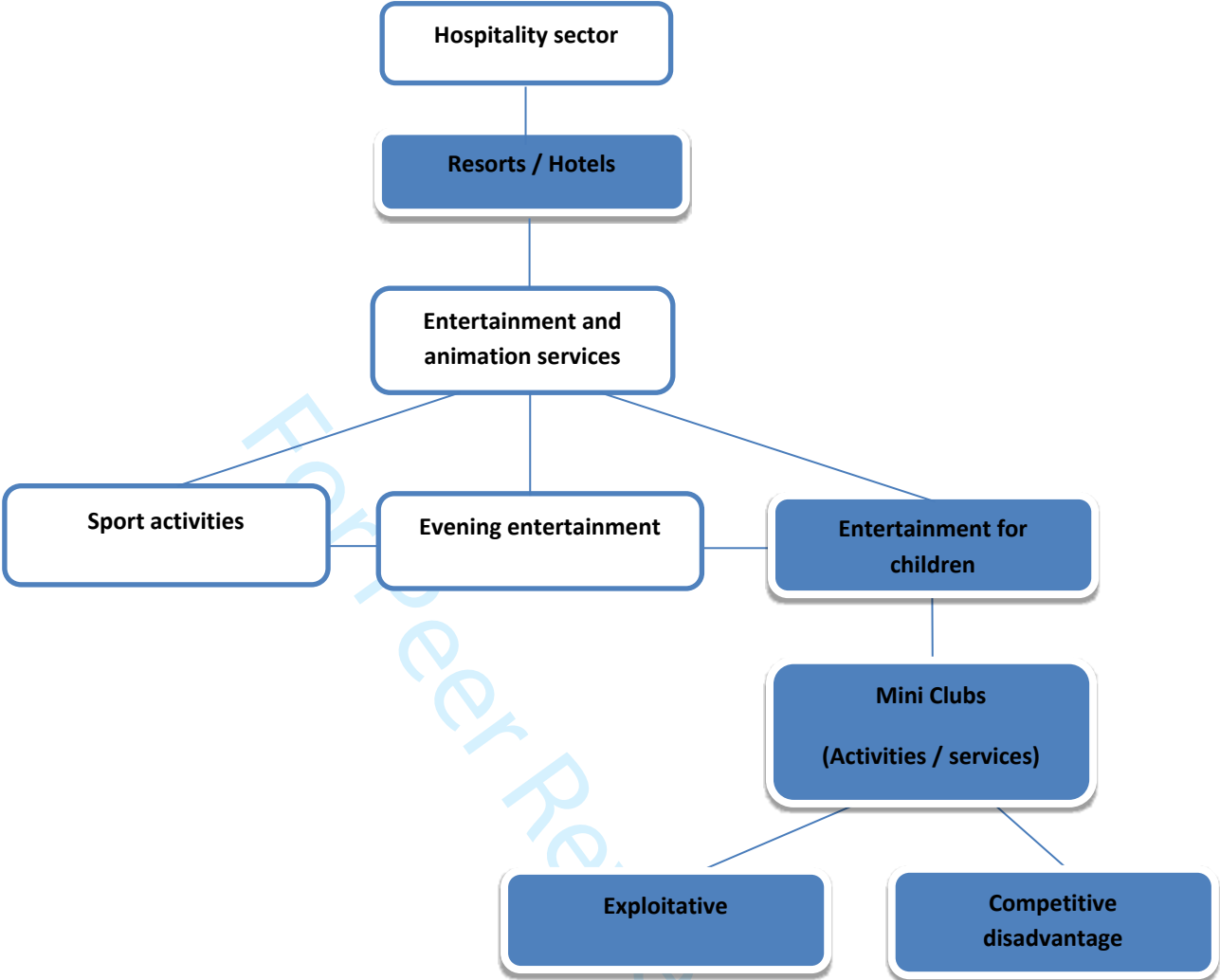


Figure 1: Articulation of Mini Clubs within resorts / hotels

Table 1: The VRIO framework

Is a resource			Supported by Organisation?	Competitive implication
Valuable?	Rare?	Difficult to imitate?		
No	----	----	Yes	Competitive disadvantage
Yes	No	----	Yes	Competitive parity
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Temporary competitive advantage
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustained competitive advantage

Source: Barney, 1997, p.163

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